

FACT SHEET

Imbalance In Nebraska Courts

Shortage of qualified sign language interpreters proves troublesome for all sides in Nebraska's legal community

Solving the Interpreter Shortage is Critical

Nebraska is not alone in facing a critical shortage of qualified sign language interpreters.

However, the state faces issues, if allowed to snowball, that will dramatically hinder a safe way of life for deaf and hard of hearing individuals living here:

- There is no accredited, viable training program for interpreters in Nebraska
- Students in existing in-state programs are leaving
- Legal interpreting assignments require the highest accreditation, yet fall short on pay

How NCDHH Addresses the Biggest Problems

NCDHH has established a committee to address the shortage of sign interpreters in Nebraska. It is working to:

- Develop a state-wide apprenticeship program that opens channels of communication among interpreters
- Research avenues linking businesses, schools, and new incentives for graduates of interpreting programs
- Research legislation recognizing American Sign Language as a visual language and offering it as foreign language credit

ISSUE: People Who Rely on Sign Language Jeopardized by Lack of Service Providers

Sixty-five percent of assignments requiring sign language interpreters in Nebraska's legal system go unfilled.

As the number of court filings in Nebraska's legal system rises, fewer deaf and hard of hearing defendants and filers receive the assistance they need due to shrinking numbers of ASL interpreters.

Legal assignments unfilled by interpreters has been a growing problem in recent years. In 2005's first six

Unfilled Legal Assignments



Before June 2005 Since June 2005

months, 40 percent of assignments went unfilled. Since then, the percentage of unfilled assignments has nearly doubled, to 65 percent.

CAUSES: Sign Interpreters Find Better Pay — And Fewer Hassles Getting Paychecks — Elsewhere



One qualified interpreter is now available to work on a regular basis at courtroom assignments in Nebraska.

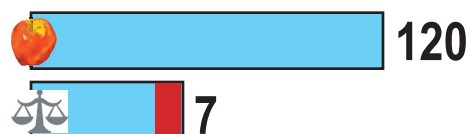
In Omaha, since a video relay service provider opened for business, offering full-time jobs to sign interpreters, the number of interpreters available for legal venues in Nebraska has dropped by 700 percent.

Until June 2005, there were seven.

Additional concerns include:

- Rate-of-pay for sign interpreters in legal assignments (\$45/Hr.) has not increased since at least 1999.
- Sign interpreters can easily **double their income** in less time working at routine business settings requiring fewer skills, with less stress, and less liability. Today, many interpreters make \$40- to \$50-per-hour, with a two-hour minimum.
- Smaller paychecks from legal assignments come with more “red tape”: multiple forms, time-consuming authorization signature searches, and clerical delays in cutting checks.

Graph: Comparison Between Sign Language Interpreters By Field



Nebraska has over 120 interpreters working in public school education settings. It lists 50 interpreters in its public directory, but only seven of those are willing to interpret for legal assignments.



**Nebraska Commission
for the Deaf
and Hard of Hearing**

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